



By TODD SPANGLER
FREE PRESS WASHINGTON STAFF

"We need to provide our children with a world-class education, so they can compete in the global economy," said U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow, a Michigan Democrat.

www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/chi-charter-schools-capjun02,0,3090913.story

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Charter schools: Illinois lawmakers pave way for number to double

Expansion comes with accountability, which teacher unions wanted

By Azam Ahmed

Tribune reporter

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Charter school proponents scored an important victory late Sunday after state lawmakers paved the way for the number of charters in Illinois to double.

Under the legislation, Chicago would be allowed 45 new charter schools, five of which would be reserved for schools enrolling high school dropouts, and 15 additional charters would be allotted for the rest of the state. Advocates say the new schools would help address the nearly 13,000 students statewide who wanted to enroll in charter schools but were squeezed out for lack of space.

The bill, which awaits Gov. Pat Quinn's signature, would make Illinois the first state to answer President Barack Obama's and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's calls to raise caps on charter schools. "Illinois has taken an important step forward in helping to bring more high-quality learning options to underserved communities," said Duncan in a statement. "As more charters open up in Illinois, it is important that we maintain high standards of accountability to ensure results for students and parents."

But the measure didn't satisfy only proponents of the charter movement. Its accountability portion satisfied teacher unions. The legislation would require charters formed before 2003 to have 75 percent of their teachers certified with the state by the 2012-13 school year. Current law requires 50 percent. The new measure also allows charter teachers to unionize under the Illinois Education Labor Relations Board.

"It really speaks to accountability," said Marilyn Stewart, president of the Chicago Teachers Union.

Chicago is home to 30 charter operators that run 67 schools. Some schools are able to operate on multiple campuses. The bill would restrict 40 of Chicago's new charters to one campus.

But the five schools re-enrolling high school dropouts will be able to open as many as 15 campuses with

Learn how his vision mobilized a powerful catalyst for social change.



up to 165 students each.

A report by Northeastern University in Boston put the number of dropouts in Illinois at more than 200,000.

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

Duncan: States could lose out on stimulus cash

By LIBBY QUAID

States will hurt their chance to compete for millions of federal stimulus dollars if they fail to embrace innovations like charter schools, Education Secretary Arne Duncan said Thursday.

Duncan was responding to a question about Tennessee, where Democratic state lawmakers have blocked an effort to let more kids into charter schools.

"States like that would not be helping their chances, I can say that," Duncan told The Associated Press during a visit to a high school in the Washington suburb of Alexandria, Va.

President Barack Obama wants to expand the number of charter schools, a daunting task in many states with laws that limit their numbers. The president argues that charter schools are creating many innovations in education today.

Charter schools are publicly funded but operate independently of local school boards, often free from the constraints of union contracts in traditional schools. As a result, they are hotly opposed by teachers and other critics who say they drain money and talent from other public schools.

But the federal stimulus law gives Obama a powerful incentive to push the expansion of charter schools. The law set up a \$5 billion fund to reward states and school districts that adopt innovations the administration supports. The fund is part of \$100 billion for education over the next two years.

"We want to reward those states that are willing to lead the country where we need to go and are willing to push this reform agenda very, very hard," Duncan told the AP.

"There are a number of states that are leading this effort, and we want to invest a huge amount of money into them, a minimum of \$100 million, probably north of that," he said.

"And the states that don't have the stomach or the political will, unfortunately, they're going to lose out," Duncan said.

Tennessee is a logical candidate for the stimulus money. The state recently overhauled its graduation requirements, academic standards and state tests, all among Obama's priorities. Tennessee had been criticized for having weak standards because its kids passed state exams, yet did poorly on well-regarded national tests.

State officials have been talking about what they might do with the stimulus money. One idea is to create an early warning system that identifies kids at risk of dropping out.

Another is to make its exhaustive warehouse of student tracking data much less cumbersome for teachers to use.

At the same time, Tennessee has perhaps the most restrictive charter school law in the country. The number of charters is capped at 50, and only failing students in failing schools are eligible to attend.

A bill in the state legislature would allow any child getting free or reduced-price meals to attend a charter school, but the cap would remain. About 16 charter schools are open in the state.

However, the Democratic caucus blocked the measure earlier this month in the House Education Committee. Only a couple of weeks remain before lawmakers adjourn for the year.

Republican state Rep. Beth Harwell, who sponsored the bill, said she's worried the state will hurt its chances at the stimulus money.

"I'm very concerned," Harwell said. "It's like we're shooting ourselves in the foot. I just would hate to see us lose this opportunity."

Duncan's comments came during a visit to Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology. Duncan spoke at a research symposium, then held a brief interview with reporters for the school newspaper and yearbook.